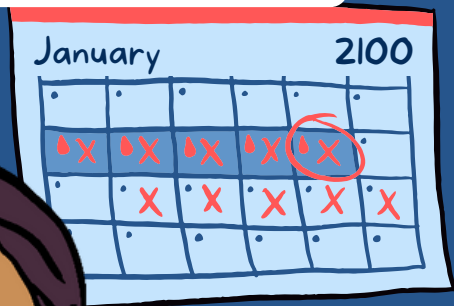# Sneha sees Snowfall

Arjun Khullar

Sneha stirred in her sleep as she felt a chill creeping over her, and reached for the blanket that normally lay unused at the foot of her bed. Pulling the covers all the way up to her chin, she turned to her side in an attempt to get more comfortable. However, the air in her usually cozy bedroom was unnaturally cold and she could feel her feet turning to ice.

Sneha lazily stepped out of bed, rubbing her hands together to generate warmth as she stepped over her slippers to turn to the window. Beside it, the calendar read, 'January, 2100.' Sneha drew open her curtains. What she saw outside the window made her jaw drop to the floor.

Sneha's home was perched upon a little hill, as were most of the houses in the Himalayan town she called home. Her bedroom window provided a glorious view of the valley and, on a clear day, she could see the sparkling river running below, and several mountains and valleys dotted with trees in the distance.
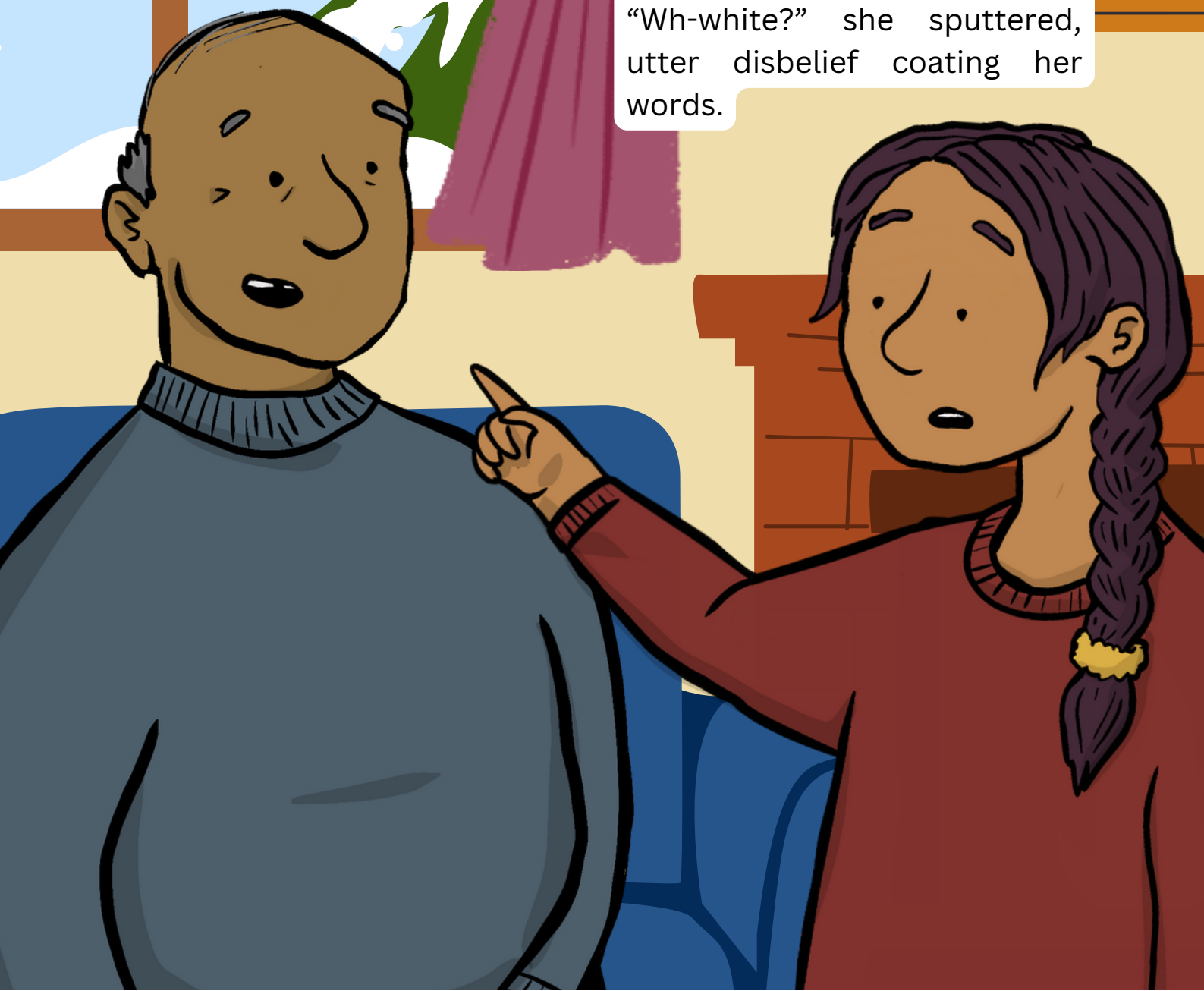
However, today, the entire scenery outside her bedroom window was painted white. The river was barely flowing, slowed down by the chunks of ice that decorated its surface, and the mountains, valleys, and trees were all coated in a soft white powder. Sneha had never seen anything like it before.

Sneha rushed towards her door, then doubled back to grab her warmest sweater, and scrambled down the stairs as she fumbled to put it on. Panting as she reached the drawing room, she found her mother, father, and maternal grandmother standing at the window, taking in the white canvas outside.

Her great-grandfather, who she lovingly called Dadam, was lounging on his morning chair, casually sipping tea and holding up his digital newspaper, although his face bore a strange mixture of amusement and excitement.
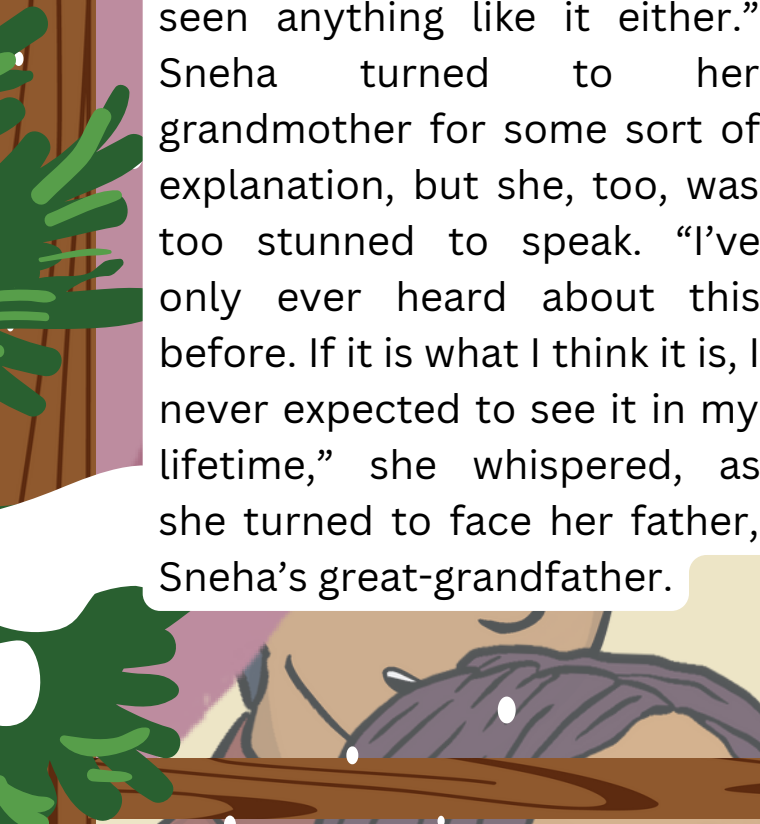
Sneha's family turned around as she entered the room noisily, gesturing frantically at the sight outside as she struggled to catch her breath. "Wh-white?" she sputtered, utter disbelief coating her words.
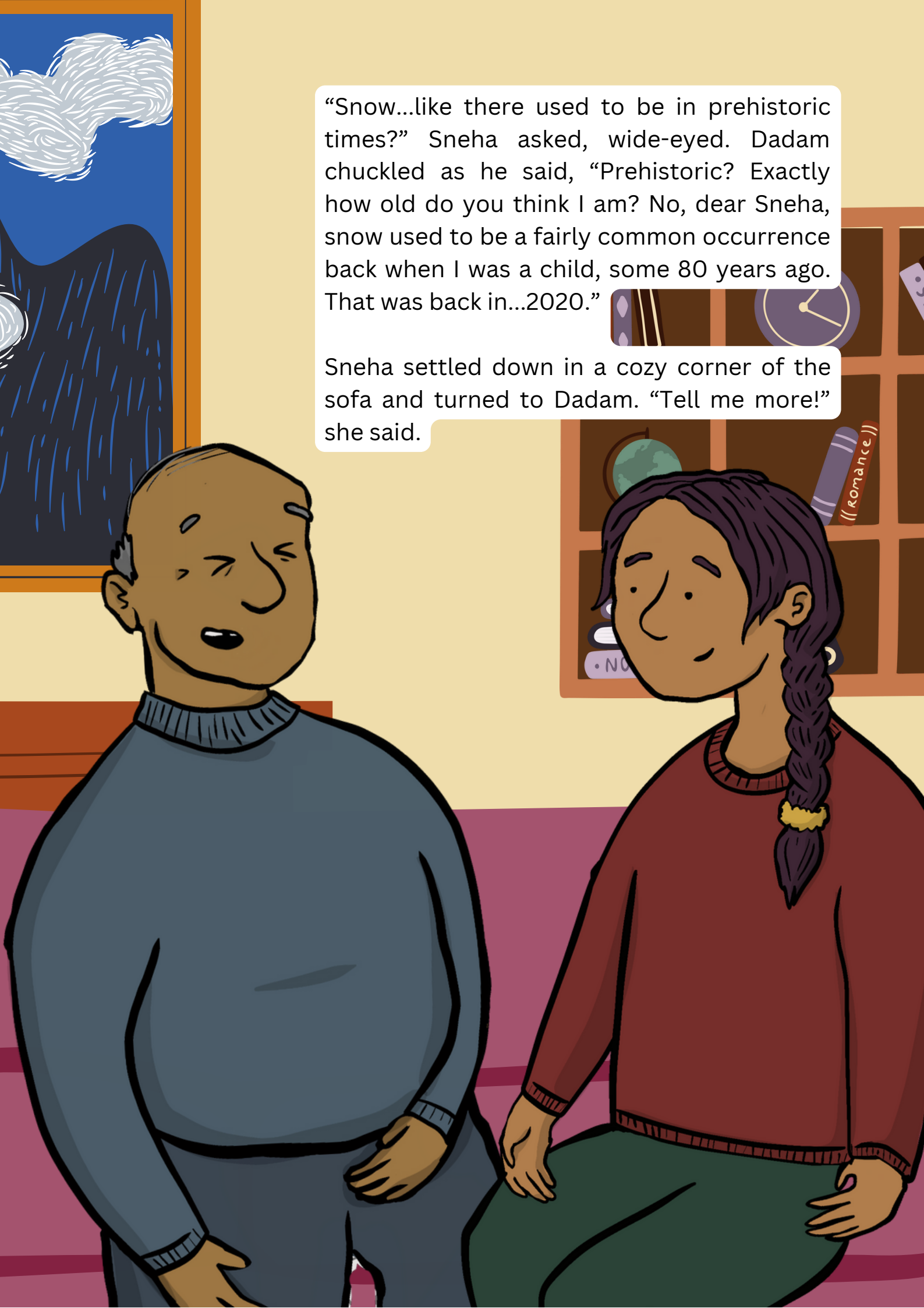
"I know," Sneha's mother said, shaking her head as she glanced outside. "I've never seen anything like it either." Sneha turned to her grandmother for some sort of explanation, but she, too, was too stunned to speak. "I've only ever heard about this before. If it is what I think it is, I never expected to see it in my lifetime," she whispered, as she turned to face her father, Sneha's great-grandfather.

"Dadam!" Sneha cried. "What's happening outside?" Hearing the concern in his family's voice, Dadam put down his tablet and slowly walked over to the window with the help of his walker. "It's snow," he said, and couldn't help but smile with incredulity as he took in the powdery white landscape outside.

"Snow...like there used to be in prehistoric times?" Sneha asked, wide-eyed. Dadam chuckled as he said, "Prehistoric? Exactly how old do you think I am? No, dear Sneha, snow used to be a fairly common occurrence back when I was a child, some 80 years ago. That was back in...2020."

Sneha settled down in a cozy corner of the sofa and turned to Dadam. "Tell me more!" she said.

"Well," Dadam began, as his entire family sat before him. "You all know snow is made out of crystallized water, right? It is essentially ice crystals that fall from the clouds. The water can only turn into ice when temperatures drop, which, by some miracle, has happened today."

"Wow," Sneha said, taking it all in. "And you said this was common when you were a child. Does that mean it snowed all the time like this? Why did it stop? How did it snow again today?" Her questions were endless.

Dadam smiled as he patiently answered his loving great-granddaughter's questions, and fielded a few from her mother and grandmother as well. He explained that it used to snow in the winter months when temperatures would drop, and given the height of the Himalayan region, snow was found in abundance, and would coat the mountain peaks regularly.

However, temperatures began rising dramatically in 2016, and as glaciers melted, sea levels rose, and extreme weather events began to occur all across the globe, snowfall gradually reduced and then stopped altogether. Sneha noticed the sadness in her grandfather's eyes as he recounted the effects of climate change he had lived through. She had never seen him like that before.

Dadam explained that climate change had been caused primarily by human activity and the emission of hazardous greenhouse gasses that had caused the Earth's temperature to rise. Sneha nodded. "I learned about this in Environment Studies class," she piped in. "Our teacher told us that temperatures rose by over 1.5 degrees Celsius and it caused havoc for weather patterns across the world. I guess I never realized it so much because it's always been relatively cool up here in our town."

Dadam nodded sadly. "It was a time of great hardship," he said. "Your grandmother might remember. Agriculture was impacted and it was hard to come by nutritious food, and humans and animals alike had to suffer through intense heat waves, floods, landslides, and hurricanes. But today, the fact that there is snow…" he trailed off.

Standing up slowly, Dadam walked towards the main door of the house without a word. "Brace yourselves," he warned, as he opened the door and a gust of freezing cold air blew through the house. Trembling as he bent down, Dadam picked up a handful of the soft, white, powder that lined their doorstep, a huge smile spreading across his face.

"Come on, Sneha," he called, gesturing for his great-granddaughter to join him. "The first snow is always the most special."

As Sneha joined him outside, accompanied by her parents and grandmother, she couldn't help but feed off her great-grandfather's joy as she began to construct a snowman. "It's happening," he smiled to himself. "Humanity has collectively been trying to restore balance to the universe after the drastic effects of climate change, and this snowfall is a wonderful sign. Our Earth is slowly healing."

And with that, he took a seat outside and watched as the townspeople began to emerge from their houses, testing the snow with caution as they stepped onto the streets, their footprints leaving a temporary mark on the pristine white canvas.

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